

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Ropers Field Conservation Area

INTRODUCTION

This document is an “appraisal” document as defined by English Heritage in their guidance document “Conservation Area Appraisals”.

The purpose of the document is, to quote from the English Heritage document, to ensure that “the special interest justifying designation is clearly defined and analysed in a written appraisal of its character and appearance”. This provides a “sound basis, defensible on appeal, for development plan policies and development control decisions” and also forms the basis for further work on design guidance and enhancement proposals.

This appraisal describes and analyses the particular character of the Ropers Field Conservation Area which was designated by the Council in 1990. This includes the more obvious aspects such as buildings, spaces and architectural development, as well as an attempt to portray the often less tangible qualities that make the area “special”.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

- (i) National policies – Individual buildings “of special architectural or historic interest” have enjoyed a means of statutory protection since the 1950’s, but the concept of protecting areas of special merit, rather than individual buildings, was first brought under legislative control with the passing of the Civic Amenities Act 1967. A crucial difference between the two is that Listed buildings are assessed against national criteria, with Lists being drawn up by English Heritage. Conservation Areas by contrast are designated by Local Authorities on more local criteria, and are therefore very varied in character. However, general guidance on the designation of Conservation Areas is included in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15), which sets out the government’s policies on the historic built environment in general. By 2005 there were eleven designated Conservation Areas in Waltham Forest.
- (ii) Local Policies – Legislation and guidance has emphasised the importance of including firm Conservation Area policies within the Unitary Development Plan (UDP), which must in turn be based on a clear definition of what constitutes that “special architectural or historic interest” which warranted designation in the first place. Policy BHE13 in the “Built and historic environment” chapter of the adopted Unitary

Development Plan 2006 is the relevant council policy concerning the designation and subsequent control of Conservation Areas within the borough.

In addition Policy 4B.7 of The London Plan produced by the Greater London Authority emphasises the need for boroughs to work with local communities to recognise and manage local distinctiveness, ensuring proposed developments preserve or enhance local social, physical, cultural, historical, environmental and economic characteristics.

DEFINITION OF SPECIAL INTEREST

(i) Location and population:

The Ropers Field Conservation Area is situated in Chingford, which since 1965 has been within the London Borough of Waltham Forest. It lies just to the north of Highams Park and the old boundary with Walthamstow, midway between the Lea Valley to the west and Epping Forest to the east. Immediately to the south of the estate, separated by a long established hedgerow, is an open area of playing fields called the Rolls Sports Ground. To the north lies Larks Wood, a sizeable area of surviving ancient woodland, now designated as Metropolitan open land and a Principal site of Nature Conservation Importance in the UDP. Immediately to the west is an open playing field and another surviving fragment of ancient woodland called Ainslie Wood, also designated a Principal Site of Nature Importance in the UDP.

The Conservation Area covers a site area of just under 2.5 acres and contains 116 properties, with an estimated population of around 600.

(ii) Origins and development of settlement:

As late as 1897 Chingford could still correctly be described as an agricultural parish and village, centred on the parish church at Chingford Green. The continued growth of London however, combined with the arrival of the Great Eastern Railway which terminated at the end of Station Road in 1878, were to prove decisive factors in the ultimate expansion and suburbanisation of the area. Unlike Walthamstow and Leyton to the south however this fundamental change did not really take place until after the First World War.

In 1895 Chingford Urban District Council came into being, governing a population of just 4000 people. By 1911 however the population had doubled, and but for an understandable hiatus between 1914 and 1918 the population increased rapidly until the 1950's as suburban housing rapidly replaced the open fields. Chingford's open spaces and pleasant situation between the Forest and the Lea Valley made it an increasingly attractive overspill area for the congested capital, and the railway afforded easy access for commuters.

In 1929 Chingford Town Hall was erected on the Ridgeway, within a stones throw of the parish church. It presided over a still expanding population of 20,000 people, and

one of the top priorities was new house building. The Council erected some 200 houses under the 1919 Housing Act in north and south Chingford, and in 1935 erected a further 60 houses on the Lawrence Hill estate to house overcrowded families in the Borough. Immediately after the Second World War the Council erected 120 temporary bungalows, mainly on what is now Highams Park, and began an extensive house building programme to deal with the increased need for accommodation compounded by war damage. By 1959 some 1350 houses and flats had been erected both in the Borough and in the Epping Urban District area.

Architecturally the most interesting of these post-war Council developments is the Ropers Field Estate situated between Larkswood, a surviving area of forest, and the Rolls sports ground. Early in 1944 with the end of the war in sight, the Council had begun to revive its house-building programme, and one of the sites identified was Ropers Field, a cricket ground close to Larkswood. The Council had to use its compulsory purchase powers to acquire the site, which drew considerable local opposition, but with Government backing the way was clear for Chingford's first post-war housing estate.

(iii) The prevailing or former uses within the area and their historic patronage, and the influence of these on the plan form and building types:

Until the site was developed for housing in 1946 it was an open field which formed part of a small farm situated near the junction of Larkshall Road and what is now Ropers Avenue. The field was used as a cricket ground and was the home of the Highams Park Cricket Club. The farm itself was known alternatively as Inks Green Farm and later Ropers Farm, after its long time occupiers, names which are still in use as local street names. The history and early ownership of the site had no part to play in the design and layout of the Ropers Field Estate.

(iv) The archaeological significance and potential of the area including identification of any scheduled ancient monuments:

There is no evidence of early settlement on this site, and it contains no scheduled ancient monuments, neither has it been identified as having any potential archaeological significance.

(v) The architectural and historic qualities of the buildings and the contribution they make to the special interest of the Conservation Area:

The Ropers Field Estate is a low-density development of semi-detached houses and maisonettes designed by a consultant architect, Reginald W Lone ARIBA, in conjunction with the Chingford Borough Engineer & Surveyor S J Hillier. The development was carried out by the Anglo-Scottish Construction Co Ltd, and the 146 homes cost the Council £235,000 – a considerably higher figure than anticipated due to an unprecedented crop of snags in construction work.

The spacious layout of the estate and the distinctive design of the properties have echoes of the Garden City and Garden Suburb movement of Ebenezer Howard,

Parker & Unwin, and other founding fathers of Town Planning from the turn of the century.

New homes in blocks or terraces inevitably had a certain urban flavour, whilst the detached house was too land hungry and costly to be an acceptable option to the Council. It was the semi-detached house which provided the still desirable compromise in the inter-war and immediate post war years, and which epitomises suburban development. This sought after house type formed the basis for the Ropers Field Estate.

“Cottage” styles, more or less loosely based on designs conceived by the Garden Suburb and small house architect of 1890-1914 were the common starting point for the suburban estates which sprang up around London in the inter-war years. Unlike many private sector speculative developments of the period, which were overly adorned with a motley assortment of fanciful architectural decoration, the design of the Ropers Field Estate properties retained the elegant simplicity of the Garden Suburb originals: painted-rendered finishes, steeply pitched hipped and gabled roofs with clay Bridgewater pantiles, elegant slim-profile Crittall windows, and bay windows, a popular and desirable feature, but rare on Council developments.

These architectural features combined with the spacious semi-detached layout of the estate contribute significantly to the special interest of the Conservation Area.

With the increased pressure for new homes through the late 1940's and 50's, and the inevitable decrease in land available for development, Chingford Council could never again afford to build at such low density and to such standards.

(vi) The contribution made by key unlisted buildings:

There are no Listed or locally Listed buildings within the Conservation Area, and as all the properties are essentially the same, all could be said to make an equal contribution to the special character of the area. In reality those properties in the most original condition, and without extensions, make the greatest contribution as exemplars for others.

(vii) The character and relationship of spaces within the area:

The houses and maisonettes were allotted generous garden space both front and rear, initially divided by utilitarian chain-link fencing. Privet hedges were soon established along the front boundaries and often between gardens, and these remain a characteristic and attractive feature of the area. The average gap between pairs of semis is around 4.0 metres and often larger, an important original feature which contributes to the spacious low-density quality of the estate. With the exception of properties on corner plots, or at the end of rows, where some side additions have been permitted, largely without compromising the special character of the area, these spaces between buildings on the whole have survived intact, and the harmful “terracing” effect of infill development thus far avoided.

Grass verges with ornamental street trees also form an intrinsic and attractive part of the original layout of the estate. Two significant areas of open space exist: the Inks

Green bowling green on the south-eastern corner of Ropers Avenue/Inks Green, and an area of amenity open space outside 64-82 Ropers Avenue. The former is still a well-used facility in full public view from the highway, the latter a somewhat neglected area of grass. Largely surrounded by hedging and with shrub beds at either end, it is now sadly much abused by local vandals. The space itself however adds to the original spacious, low density quality of the estate, and with appropriate management its intrinsic qualities could easily be re-established.

(viii) Prevalent and traditional building materials, textures and colours:

The original building materials and finishes within the Estate are red/brown facing brickwork and predominantly-smooth rendered finishes, usually with a painted finish. Where they were painted, the properties appear to have originally been finished in varieties of mellow off-white or cream, although over the years a greater variety of pastel colours has been used, some more appropriate than others.

All the roofs within the area were, and still are, finished in red/brown double-roman Bridgewater clay pantiles, with matching clay half-round tiles to ridges and hips. Smaller plain clay tiles of the same colour were used on the canopies over the front doors, also as window cills, and sometimes as tile hanging on window bays. Often the tiles on both door canopies and window cills have been painted with red tile paint, and this is now a long established local feature of the estate.

Painted steel windows, probably manufactured by Crittalls of Braintree Essex, were the original equipment used throughout the estate, and feature the horizontal glazing bars made popular by the “Modern Movement”. The strength of steel permitted the use of very slim section glazing bars, and numerous examples still survive within the area. Modern double-glazed Crittall windows, complete with the horizontal glazing bar arrangement of the originals, have been used on properties which remain in Council ownership, thus retaining the original character and appearance of the buildings. These act as exemplars for others.

Footpaths and other hard surfaces within the curtilage of the properties were originally formed from concrete with a high gravel content to add a degree of textural and visual interest.

(ix) Local details:

The estate was designed as a whole entity and the buildings have a number of distinctive standard features, although these are not necessarily exclusive to either the work of the architect Reginald W Lone ARIBA or the Chingford area.

Steeply pitched 47° roofs, with swept eaves and exposed rafter-ends are typical and distinctive original features of the estate. The Crittall windows common to the original design were set within 4½" reveals with double-tile window cills and drip mouldings over. Painted timber “cottage-style” front doors were used throughout the estate with a brick surround, although Crittall doors and windows were used to side and rear.

On the highway verges the estate features distinctive concrete street-lights contemporary in design with the immediate post-war period, now something of a rarity in the Borough. These unfortunately are no longer in production, so what happens when they reach the end of their useful life has yet to be established.

(x) The contribution made by green spaces, hedges and other natural or cultivated elements to the character of the Conservation Area:

Within the estate itself many front gardens still retain their original privet hedging, which both encloses the front gardens and separates them from the street. Used also around the one area of public amenity space within the estate, privet hedging is the most characteristic plant apart from grass within the area.

In the context of the overall layout the amenity space in front of 64-82 Ropers Avenue was probably conceived as a village green in miniature, although in reality it only performs this function visually. Its main role seems to be to add an additional focal point to the area, counterbalancing the open space of the bowling green at the other end of Ropers Avenue, and re-emphasising the low density suburban quality of the estate.

(xi) The setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the landscape or open countryside, including definition of significant landmarks, vistas and panoramas, where appropriate:

The suburban quality of the estate is undoubtedly enhanced by its attractive location between a number of areas of surviving green space which largely surround it. Immediately to the north, opposite 2-53 Inks Green, is Larkswood, a surviving fragment of ancient woodland, once part of the great forest of Waltham. To the south, immediately behind the rear gardens of 1-79 Ropers Avenue and separated by an old long-established hedgerow, is the Rolls sports ground. Now playing fields and public open space, The Rolls was the longtime property of the Ainslie family. To the west, at the end of Ropers Avenue is Ainslie Wood, another remnant of ancient woodland and now a local nature reserve. Adjoining Ainslie Wood to the north, and between the recently built Ainslie Wood School and 75-101 Underwood Road is another area of grassed public open space suitable for more formal recreation. These surrounding areas of open space and woodland contribute significantly to the character of the Ropers Field Estate, giving it an almost rural quality.

Views into and out of the estate are largely restricted by mature trees around the edges to the north and south.

(xii) The extent of loss, intrusion or damage. ie the negative factors:

The attractive uniformity of the estate has undoubtedly been eroded over the years by numerous unsympathetic alterations. The replacement of original windows and doors with inappropriate modern alternatives, unpainted and usually with no glazing bars, has undoubtedly had a detrimental effect on the character and appearance of the area. The construction of front porches of various designs beneath the original tiled canopies has also introduced an alien feature into what was a simple and uniform elevation.

The gradual loss of the front boundary hedges and the increase in off street parking in front gardens has been similarly detrimental. The introduction of more or less decorative brick walls in place of a front hedge, or the opening-up of the frontage completely and paving over the front garden, has introduced increasingly urban elements into the streetscene.

The use of more strident colours when properties have been repainted has harmed the subtle uniformity of the estate. Muted pastel colours by contrast are not considered to be unduly harmful.

The erection of a new school to the west of the estate in the mid 1990's has lead to greatly increased traffic passing through the area, which in turn has lead to the introduction of traffic calming measures in the form of speed humps. Both are profoundly negative factors which have eroded the quiet suburban quality that the estate originally enjoyed.

(xiii) The existence of any neutral areas:

The estate was conceived and built as a whole, and almost every part is considered to contribute to the overall character and appearance of the Conservation Area. The bowling green pavilion is the only built element that was not part of the masterplan for the estate, and is a building of no special architectural or historic interest.

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CONSERVATION OFFICER

MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

Ropers Field Conservation Area

(i) Legislative background

The designation of a Conservation Area and production of an Appraisal document is not an end in itself. The Appraisal provides the basis for developing management proposals for the Conservation Area that fulfil the general duty placed on the local authority under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, now formalised in BV 219c, to draw up and publish such proposals. The purpose of this document is to present draft proposals which seek to achieve the preservation and enhancement of the special character of the Conservation Area, informed by the Appraisal, for consultation. The special qualities of the Conservation Area have been identified as part of the appraisal process in the first part of this document, and both will be subject to monitoring and review. This guidance draws on the themes identified in the Appraisal, and satisfies the statutory requirement of section 71(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, namely:

“It shall be the duty of the local planning authority from time to time to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area which are Conservation Areas”.

This document reflects Government guidance set out in Planning Policy Guidance 15 “Planning and the Historic Environment”, English Heritage guidance set out in “Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas”, policies within the Waltham Forest Unitary Development Plan 2006, and guidance contained in the published Conservation Area leaflet for the area.

(ii) Statutory controls

Designation as a Conservation Area brings with it a degree of additional statutory protection under planning legislation aimed at assisting the “preservation or enhancement” of the area. These controls include the need for Conservation Area consent for the demolition of any unlisted buildings, the need for planning consent for roof extensions, most forms of external cladding, and the installation of satellite dishes visible from the street, significantly reduced “permitted development rights” for alterations and extensions to dwelling houses, and 6 weeks written notice of works to trees not already protected by Tree Preservation Orders. In September 2004 an Article 4(2) Direction was made on the area which removed certain additional “permitted development rights” and as a result planning permission is required for nearly all external works which affect the appearance of properties in the area. These

restrictions are outlined in more detail in the Council's guidance leaflet "Ropers Field Conservation Area".

Action: The Council will ensure that new development within the Conservation Area preserves or enhances the character or appearance of the area in accordance with policy BHE 13 of the adopted Unitary Development Plan 2006 and other published guidance.

(iii) Erosion of character and additional planning control

The Conservation Area Appraisal identified the following as works which pose a threat to, or detract from, the special character of the Conservation Area:

- Replacement of original windows and doors with inappropriate modern alternatives.
- Construction of front porches of various designs beneath original tiled canopies.
- The loss of front garden privet hedges, notably with replacement decorative walls.
- The complete opening up of front gardens and replacement with paved areas.
- Increase in use of front gardens for off-street car parking.
- Use of strident colour schemes when buildings are repainted which adversely affected the subtle uniformity of the estate.
- Increased through traffic in the estate in recent years, which has affected its character & amenity.

Regrettably there are numerous examples of unsympathetic alterations having been carried out, which both individually and cumulatively detract from the special character or appearance of the area. If left unchecked such works will gradually erode the special qualities that justified the original designation. The Council will therefore take appropriate enforcement action, where it is expedient, to remove unauthorised works.

On a positive note, the Council has produced a Conservation Area Guidance leaflet for residents within the Ropers Field area, and subject to resources provides grant aid towards the cost of repair or restoration of original features.

Action: The Council will ensure that unauthorised development is subject to effective enforcement action wherever practicable, to protect the special character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

(iv) Trees

If not already protected by a Tree Preservation Order, anyone intending to lop or fell a tree within the Conservation Area greater than 100mm in diameter at 1.5 metres above ground level, is required to give the Council 6 weeks written notice before starting work. This provides the Council with an opportunity of assessing the tree to see if it makes a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the

Conservation Area, in which case a Tree Preservation Order may be served. Free professional advice on all tree issues, whether the pruning of existing trees or advice on suitable species for planting, is always available from Council Tree Officers.

Action: The Council will consider the use of Tree Preservation Orders wherever appropriate where a tree of high amenity value is considered to be under threat. These will include trees within and outside the area where they contribute to the setting of the Conservation Area or views identified in the Appraisal. The Council will maintain and replace as necessary the street trees in the Conservation Area, and continue to provide free professional advice on all tree matters as required.

(v) *Setting and views*

The suburban context of the Conservation Area, it's "setting", is very important, and development which would not preserve or enhance the character or appearance of the area or its setting, or which would impact detrimentally on views into and out of the area will be resisted. The important views are identified in the Conservation Area Appraisal, and the Council will seek to ensure that all new development respects these views.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that all development respects the setting of the Conservation Area and important views within, into, and out of the area identified in the Appraisal. These will be protected from inappropriate forms of development.

(vi) *The public realm and enhancement*

The Appraisal has identified the grass verges and ornamental street trees within the Conservation Area as important components contributing to its overall character. The street calming works in the Conservation Area with associated highway signs inevitably detract visually from the quality of the public realm but are necessary evils to prevent rat-running through the area. Lighting is provided by concrete lamp columns contemporary in style and materials with the date of construction of the area. These are therefore considered to be an appropriate and positive feature in the context of the character or appearance of the Conservation Area.

The restoration, replanting and maintenance of the small amenity open space outside 64-82 Ropers Avenue would enhance the character and appearance of the area and reinforce its special identity. An audit of the public realm should be undertaken to identify redundant features, opportunities for enhancement etc, subject to resources.

Action: The Council will seek to ensure that any surviving historic streetscape features are retained, and that any future highway works will bring a positive improvement to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area in accordance with the spirit of the English Heritage "Streets for all" campaign

(vii) Monitoring and review

The following actions need to be taken to ensure that this appraisal and management plan are accepted and acted upon:

- *Public Consultation: The appraisal and management plan will be subject to a period of public consultation and views expressed as part of that process will be considered when preparing the final draft for Council adoption. Consultation will include placing the documents on the Council website, in libraries and council offices, consultation with local amenity groups and residents associations where they exist, and providing hard copies on request. A letter advising of these arrangements will be delivered to all properties in the area by mail shot.*
- *Boundary review: The Council will maintain the current boundary of the Conservation Area and continue to review it over time in accordance with Best Practice and guidance on the management of the historic environment produced by English Heritage.*
- *Document review: This document should be reviewed every five years in the light of the Local Development Framework and emerging government policy. A review should include the following:*
 - (i) *A survey of the Conservation Area and its boundaries*
 - (ii) *An updated “heritage count” comprising a comprehensive photographic record.*
 - (iii) *An assessment of whether the management proposals detailed in this document have been acted upon, including proposed enhancements.*
 - (iv) *The production of a short report detailing the findings of the survey and proposed actions and amendments.*
 - (v) *Public consultation on the review findings, any proposed changes, and input into the final review.*

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